

Head Lice Information Packet for Schools

This Sample Information Packet contains the following:

- 1) Guidelines for Parents on Control of Head Lice
- 2) Sample Letter from School to Parents

These materials may be reproduced by any school in part or as a whole and may be modified to suit particular situations.

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS ON CONTROL OF HEAD LICE

Disease Investigation and
Surveillance Branch

California Department of Health Services

Head lice continue to be a problem in homes, day care centers, elementary and preschools in California and elsewhere. Head-to-head contact or, less frequently, an exchange of hats, clothing, combs, brushes, barrettes, helmets, scarves, headphones, and other personal items can transmit lice from an infested child to others. Most schools have a “no-nit” policy, so treatment and use of a nit comb are needed before an infested child can return to school.

Inspecting a Child’s Head and Nit Combing

Daily removal of lice and their eggs (“nits”) from a child’s hair with a metal nit or flea comb is the most important lice control measure. It is important to inspect the child’s and sibling’s hair thoroughly, especially close to the scalp at the neckline and behind the ears. Complete nit combing of the entire head has to be performed every day until no more lice or nits are found. Several brands of combs are available. The LiceMeister®* metal comb with long teeth is available from the National Pediculosis Association (800-446-4672), is easy to use, and costs about \$10. This and other effective devices may also be purchased at your local pharmacy. Any nits (correct identification of actual nits is critical) that cannot be combed out must be removed either by picking them out with the fingernails or by snipping the hair between the scalp and where the eggs are attached.

Treatment for Head Lice

Permethrin or pyrethrin is the active ingredient in most over-the-counter control products. The active ingredient of choice is permethrin, which is

currently in Nix®* cream rinse formulation. Follow the label directions carefully, but do not go beyond the recommended one-time for application without consulting a physician. Do not treat a second time until 7-10 days following the first treatment.

Treatment “failures” usually result from the following: 1) incorrect identification (not lice), 2) incomplete combing out or removal of the nits (eggs), 3) not realizing it may take 8-12 hours for the lice to die, 4) lice re-infestation, or 5) not strictly following labeled directions. Resistance could be considered as a possible reason for failure if none of the above applies. If neither permethrin nor pyrethrin products are effective, one alternative is 0.5% malathion (Ovide®*), which requires a prescription. The label of this alcohol-based product states 8-12 hours contact time is needed, then remove nits with a fine-toothed comb.

Non-Recommended Control Measures

There is no convincing scientific evidence to support use of products such as vinegar or advertised compounds to dissolve the glue on the nits (to ease their removal) or kill the nits. In addition, there is no documented scientific data to support claims that mayonnaise or olive oil on the hair “suffocate” the nits and lice.

Lice Biology and Washing Recommendations

Lice die within 1-2 days without a blood meal. Nits take 8-10 days to hatch and then it takes about nine or more days for the lice to become adults and lay eggs. Since it is possible for nits or lice to be on items used by the child prior to treatment, clothing and bedding should be washed in hot water. Dry on hot cycle for at least 20 minutes. Items that are not washable should be dry cleaned or put in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks to prevent hatched lice from getting a blood meal. Soak combs,

brushes, hair bands, and barrettes in soapy hot water for one hour (or boil for five minutes). Carpets and furniture can be vacuumed daily. THERE IS NO NEED TO APPLY PESTICIDES IN THE HOME!

Please contact your local health department if there are additional questions. These guidelines are on the Department of Health Services web site at <http://www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/dcdc/html/publicat.htm>

*Use of a product name is for identification purposes only and does not constitute endorsement.

Sample Letter from School to Parents

Dear Parents of _____ ,

In a screening at your child's school, your child was found to have head lice. A diagnosis of head lice means that crawling lice or head lice eggs (also known as nits) attached to the hair were found.

Head lice are small, wingless insects about the size of a sesame seed. They only live on the human scalp (not on family pets) and feed by sucking blood. Head lice range in color and can be white, gray, brown or red. The female louse lays eggs in the head hairs, usually at the junction of the scalp and hair shaft. The eggs hatch within 7 to 10 days and the newly hatched louse must have a blood meal within minutes in order to survive. If a louse drops off a person, it only survives for 1 to 2 days.

Four Critical Steps in Treatment:

1. Nit removal from the head by combing is the most important lice control measure. Complete nit removal is time consuming but it is **critical** for successful treatment;
2. Use of an effective head louse treatment;
3. Removal of all lice and nits from the environment by washing or vacuuming. There is no need to spray pesticides at home;
4. Daily head checks and nit removal until infestation is gone followed by weekly head checks to detect reinfestation.

Students with lice/nits are not allowed to attend school. This guideline is from the Center for Disease Control.

When your child returns to school after being sent home with head lice, a thorough head check will be done to ensure that all nits and lice are gone.

Please see the attached materials from the California Department of Health Services regarding head lice and their treatment.

School Nurse